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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 139642

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SUBJECT: A/S HILL'S OCTOBER 1 MEETING WITH SINGAPORE FM
GEORGE YEO

Classified By: EAP A/S Christopher R. Hill, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: A/S Hill welcomed ASEAN FMs' strong statement last week against the Burmese regime,s recent crackdown, and told Foreign Minister Yeo that it was important for ASEAN to continue applying pressure. Yeo advised that U.S. pressure should not push the Burmese leadership to the limit because bringing down the regime could result in civil war, regional instability and waves of refugees in the region. The best way forward was to support UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari,s efforts and press the regime to begin an honest dialogue with the opposition, Yeo said, adding that Aung San Suu Kyi had agreed to meet with the Government. He said China had used its own leverage with Burma to ensure that Gambari would get a meeting with leader Than Shwe. Yeo revealed Gambari will meet with him and Singapore Prime Minister Lee on his return to Singapore. Yeo said ASEAN looked forward to an early Summit with President Bush in Texas, and asked for a proposed date as soon as possible. Yeo revealed the ASEAN Charter was "all wrapped up" and was getting a final legal review before its scheduled signing at the ASEAN Summit in November. The Charter will reference the creation of a human rights body but leave the details to be worked out. Yeo said Singapore,s Ministry of Defense is considering an extension of its support to a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan. End Summary.

BURMA

12. (C) In an October 1 meeting on the margins of UNGA, A/S Hill praised the strong statement made by ASEAN Foreign Ministers last week against Burma's crackdown on peaceful demonstrations. Yeo said that the regime,s shooting of Buddhist monks was described to him by one of the ASEAN foreign ministers as a &different kind of crime8 for anyone who was a Buddhist (i.e., implying that such a crime was nearly unimaginable for Buddhists). A/S Hill urged that Singapore and other ASEAN countries to apply further pressure on the regime. Yeo saw the Chilean model as a possible way forward for Burma, where despite lots of "nasty business" the Chileans were able to slowly move towards progress while waiting for General Pinochet to die. In response to a question from A/S Hill about Than Shwe,s health and medical treatment in Singapore, Yeo said Shwe,s cancer was not life-threatening, and that his health was "quite ok."

GAMBARI'S MISSION

13. (C) Turning to UN Special Envoy Gambari,s current

mission to Burma, Yeo said that Aung San Suu Kyi (AASK) told Gambari that she was prepared to have a dialogue with the junta. While it was useful to have the United States as a &bad cop⁸ while Gambari played the &good cop,⁸ it would be critical not to create conditions for Gambari,s mission to fail. Yeo advised that it was important not to push the regime to the limit and "burn it down," because what might rise from the ashes could be even worse than the current regime, including civil war, regional instability, and refugees streaming into neighboring countries. If the United States pushes the regime to the limit, Yeo posited, Than Shwe would also push things to the limit, and as a result, Gambari,s mission would be &neutralized.⁸ A/S Hill indicated that the United States would likely soon start pushing Singapore and others to put economic pressure on the regime, including shutting down bank accounts of junta members, for example; Yeo responded that such actions were tactical, but it is more important to find a strategy to make a difference in what is happening in Burma, a way to strengthen Gambari. A/S Hill observed that the United States has consistently supported Gambari,s work, and had called for political reconciliation and dialogue.

¶4. (C) Yeo contended that if the Burmese regime was overthrown, there would be continued fighting inside Burma that could turn into a long and drawn-out domestic conflict with waves of refugees flowing into neighboring countries, with India and China striving to maintain influence. Supporting Gambari and ASSK,s call for dialogue was the

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preferred course. While Burma was a difficult test case for ASEAN (noting that Singapore had originally opposed Burma,s entry into ASEAN in the late 1980s), ultimately he believed the test of time would show that it was better for Burma to be inside ASEAN rather than outside, where it would be subjected to India's and China,s quest for control and influence, resulting in fighting on &our doorstep.⁸ Yeo said he thought ASEAN,s strong statement against the regime,s actions and in support of Gambari,s mission had made it easier for China to pressure the junta, as ASEAN had clearly set itself against Burma.

¶5. (C) Singapore UN Permanent Representative Menon revealed that the Chinese were pressuring Burma to ensure that Gambari met with Than Shwe. He said both the Chinese Ambassador and the UN,s resident coordinator Charles Petrie were at the airport to greet Gambari. When the Burmese authorities tried to ban Petrie from the arrival, the Chinese Ambassador intervened, noting that if the junta tried to dismiss Petrie, he would also leave. Menon added that the Chinese Ambassador had underscored to the Burmese that Gambari would not be leaving &until he sees Than Shwe.⁸ Yeo said that he would be returning to Singapore in time to meet with Gambari on Thursday morning at 10:00, before Gambari meets with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at 11:30. Yeo said he would tell Gambari that he has ASEAN,s full backing.

ASEAN-U.S. SUMMIT

¶6. (C) Yeo asked for the United States to propose a date for the U.S.-ASEAN Summit in Texas as soon as possible so Singapore could work with ASEAN countries to confirm the date. He confirmed that ASEAN countries were all pleased with the President,s invitation to Texas.

ASEAN CHARTER

¶7. (C) Yeo told A/S Hill that the ASEAN Charter was &all wrapped up⁸ and now undergoing a legal scrub, but was otherwise ready to be signed at the Singapore-hosted November ASEAN Summit. Yeo said that Charter language on the proposed

human rights body would merely indicate that such a body will be established, but with the terms of reference for the body still to be discussed.

AFGHANISTAN PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS

18. (C) A/S Hill urged Singapore to continue supporting a PRT in Afghanistan after its current team finishes its assignment at the end of October 2007. Yeo replied that its Ministry of Defense was considering what to do next. While not indicating what Singapore would do, Yeo noted that Singapore understood the symbolic importance of maintaining a presence. Singapore wanted to be sure that any future support it might offer would be sustainable, he said.
RICE